Focus on hospitality and health

In line with its local and global aspirations, UCSI University is expanding on two key sectors of growth.

By LUWITA HANA RANDHAWA
educate@thestar.com.my

OVER the last two years, UCSI University has begun focusing on the development of two key areas: hospitality and tourism and premium health education.

In line with boosting its courses in hospitality and tourism, the UCSI Group is developing three five-star hotels in Bandar Springhill, Kuching and Kuala Lumpur that will feature premium resort and convention facilities.

The hotels will serve as centres to improve both the quality and diversity of the future hospitality and tourism workforce, preparing them to cope with the demands of what is regarded as the fifth largest industry in the national economy, says Chairman of the UCSI University Council, Tan Sri Musa Mohamad.

The varsity is also developing a 64 ha integrated premium health education hub in Bandar Springhill, Negri Sembilan.

Located within this hub is the UCSI International School, he says which opened its doors in September.

It offers the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme and state-of-the-art accommodation and recreational facilities.

The UCSI University Hospital, also part of the hub, aims to prepare 10,000 healthcare graduates to enter the global market by 2015.

"This will be a new teaching and research hospital for our medical students, but it will also provide hospitality facilities to the population within that locality and draw in medical tourism," adds Musa, who was a former Education Minister. Construction of the hospital, he says is currently underway.

"Through our developing of the hotels and the education hub, we are able to contribute to national development in a more direct and tangible way, which is something we are more than happy to do," he says.

UCSI has also become a leading Praxis university with the Praxis model of teaching that advocates the direct application of theory to practice, says Musa.

Praxis centres, which are actually business outfits, have been built on campus where students can serve their internships and be trained in-house. The centres include a skin science firm (Laurent Bleu Skin Science Centre), the UCSI Cafe and a construction firm (Campio Builders).

UCSI also conducts the Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS) MBA, a blended-learning syllabus enhanced by its Blue Ocean Strategy component.

The university is home to the Blue Ocean Strategy Regional Centre, which allows it to serve as a Praxis centre for students who get hands-on consulting experience guided by BOS practitioners, he adds.

Musa adds that the 18-month programme is for individuals with a bachelor degree in any discipline and five years managerial working experience.

Currently the university has three campuses in Kuala Lumpur, Terengganu and Sarawak. There are plans to expand and improve upon the Terengganu and Sarawak campuses.

Expansion and improvement is an inevitable result of the future, he adds.

"UCSI started some 25 years ago with a tuition class that Datuk Peter Ng (UCSI Founder and Group Chairman) conducted with a small capital. I marvel at his enthusiasm and entrepreneurship and it is this sort of spirit that will carry us into the future," Musa says.

"Similarly, we operate on the principle of academic autonomy, meaning that the University Council does not interfere in any academic decisions made by the University Senate, and I believe this is an important principle which every university must abide by.

"Without doing so, it ceases to be an institution of wisdom and academic endeavours and cannot survive in the long-term.

"To carry ourselves well into the future, I believe universities must also be increasingly global in its perspective," he shares.

"Here at UCSI we currently have 3,500 foreign students from 80 different countries out
Inhouse training:
Praxis is the varsity’s effort at blending the students in both the workplace and classroom. – File photo

of our 10,000 student body and we hope to continue to build this network,” adds Musa.

He also believes that, in addition to serving workplace demands, universities must serve greater universal demands.

“Universities are centres for the dissemination of knowledge and, as we know, knowledge is fast replacing other resources to spearhead the economy.

“Universities provide tools towards individual prosperity and social mobility.

“As centres of knowledge, universities must also rise to contribute and solve challenges that cross borders: issues of war and peace, poverty, the environment and sustainability,” says Musa, adding that it is not just for governments to grapple with these issues anymore. UCSI University is a contributor to the Star Education Fund.

International outlook: Musa believes universities must also be increasingly global in its perspective.
Hands-on experience: Students are constantly trained to deliver the best in the hospitality industry. — File photo